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Where do we go from here?

A Short Future History of Netrunner

by Douglas Kaufman, TRC Chair
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Poor **Netrunner**. You'd think a really well-designed collectible card game done by Richard Garfield, licensed from popular R. Talsorian, and marketed by Wizards of the Coast, would have more oomph. But it was not to be: for whatever reason (speculations are best reserved for another article) it never sold well enough to please its corporate masters, and now Wizards has announced that it will no longer support any of its C-list titles, **Netrunner** included.

What does that mean for the TRC? Frankly, not much, at least not in my opinion. The major blow this delivers is the certainty that from now on there will be no more official expansions for **Netrunner**. This is sad, but since the release of *Classic* was such a surprise anyway, a lack of future supplements hardly counts as devastating news. **Netrunner** was moribund before this happened, now it is merely more so. In fact, in a strange way this opens up greater possibilities for expansions.

The most likely method will be through *Apprentice* or some other form of Virtual **Netrunner**. A fitting place for the game, actually—and it might allow for some of the previously created virtual expansions to actually find an audience.

It also means lack of prize support from WotC for tournament organizers. This is a blow as well, but I imagine the upshot will be prize packages bought on Ebay or coming from the organizer's private stash. And to be realistic, most enthusiasts don't play NR for the prizes anyway.

Does lack of support from Wizards mean that the TRC is useless or should be abandoned? Not at all, in my opinion. In fact, if anything, it makes us more vital. A fan club for a going concern like **Magic** is just a bunch of people sitting around admiring their hero. A fan club for a game no longer supported by its original publisher now has a mission. Here are some of the things that we could do:

1) Continue to organize large-scale events like GenCon tournaments and Gridlock Weekend.
2) Seek other publishers for **Netrunner** cards.
3) Design virtual expansions and publish them through *Apprentice* or other software.
4) Create the "Dioscuri" cards and try to get them published in **Top Deck** magazine.
5) Continue the listserv to discuss the game.
6) Continue the TRQ to let the membership know there are other players out there.
7) Update the rankings list.

The TRC is a fan club, not of Wizards of the Coast, but of the game of **Netrunner**. That game continues to exist even if the publisher is no longer "supporting" the game. Yes, it's nice to be part of a living, breathing thing—but not necessary.

Douglas "Rabbi Small" Kaufman, TRC Chair

State of the Corp—June 2000

by Jennifer Clarke Wilkes
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Hard times in HQ. That about sums it up as far as **Netrunner**—and any other "classic" game—is concerned. The DCI has announced that it will stop supporting the game, and the supply of prize materials available to me is drying up. This isn't exactly the same as not supporting the game at all (we still have the cards for sale), but it might as well be in the eyes of the average player.

I consider it a victory for the fans that Wizards printed the *Classic*™ mini-expansion at all, but a terrible failure that its sales—even for such a tiny print run—have been very weak. Perhaps one-third of the cards have been sold, making it one of the worst-performing products this company has ever made (even though there was little real expectation of profit). Of course, much of the blame lies at this end: We didn't market it, we didn't have it for sale in our stores or ship it overseas in a timely manner (if at all), and we gave it a misleading name. Still, I had hoped more players would purchase the new cards, or more of them.

I am still here, however, and I still have stuff to support the game for a while yet. I continue to push the idea of outsourcing the game or even transferring ownership. At this point, though, out best bet might be to work more with fan-generated sets like RIP, Open War, and the like, as text files to be used in conjunction with card sleeves, to keep the game environment fresh and interesting. Fans of the **Mythos**™ card game by Chaosium are doing this, and even have websites devoted to weird expansions like *Scooby Doo*. Chaosium is quite supportive of such efforts, and I think Wizards would be as well (as long as no trademarks are infringed, such as logos and distinctive card elements).

In the meantime, I continue to Fight the Good Fight.

Yours in the struggle—"Jen of Arc"

"Elementary, My Dear Wilson!"
Famous Netrunner Stacks
#7: ASD/Corp War

by Jens Kreutzer
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The three difficulty-reducing agendas Artificial Security Directors (ASD), Executive Extraction and Genetics-Visionary Acquisition have always tickled a Corp player's fancy, since they get around a restriction that is inherent to **Netrunner**: Normally, an agenda cannot be installed and scored in one turn, since its difficulty is at least 3—barring "fast-advance" approaches like Systematic Layoffs or Chicago Branch. Unlike Washington City Grid and the three corresponding *Proteus*™ upgrades, which have a similar effect, the speed granted by these agendas cannot be neutralized by trashing. Once scored, they let the Corp player bang through a 3-difficulty agenda in one turn, without having to fear any Runner interference for the rest of the game. Of course, attention must be given to the keywords Research, Gray Ops, and Black Ops, as appropriate.

Deck designs built around this neat effect abound, but the two that are the most famous are the "Golden Loop" deck and ASD/Corp War. The former has the more consequent philosophy, using six copies of each difficulty-reducing agenda, which can lead to astounding results, since the effects are cumulative. Games with agendas of modified difficulty 0 are not unheard-of (you still need to install them to score them, however).

In contrast, ASD/Corp War shies away from the prospect of including 18 agendas in a 45-card deck (40% agenda ratio), concentrating on an optimized, minimized ratio instead. ASD, Executive Extraction and Genetics-Visionary Acquisition work best with 3-difficulty agendas, though, so the choice is rather limited if we want to cram as many agenda points as possible onto one card. Corporate War is the only 3-difficulty agenda worth 3 agenda points and quickly suggests the ideal combination of ASD/Corp War. With the popular selection of five Corporate War and three ASD in a 45-card deck, we can whittle down the agenda ratio to 17,8%, greatly reducing the Runner's odds of getting hold of our sensitive data.

Ideally, we would like to score an ASD early on, so that two single-turn Corp Wars can then win the game. Unfortunately, with only three copies of it in the deck, the chances of drawing and scoring an ASD early on are not too good. More often than not, ASD will turn up as the second or third agenda, or not at all. Because of this risk, it is advisable to include multiple copies of Systematic Layoffs as a backup. Though rather expensive, they greatly help with scoring the one ASD we need, and also with Corp Wars that have to be waged without the help of Artificial Security Directors.

Ice selection and bit-gaining are more or less standard fare, with an endless number of possible approaches. Note, however, the reduced need for subsidiary data forts due to our strategy of "fast-advancing" agendas, and that the huge bit influx generated by a Corporate War that is "won" (scored with at least 12 bits in our pool) can make heavy-caliber ice feasible. With the support of ASD, scoring a Corp War only costs 2 bits, which makes it comparatively easy to "win" it.

The following is my own version of an ASD/Corp War deck, focusing on the main concept without too much fancy stuff. To increase the chance of drawing the first ASD when we need it, additional drawing power (Annual Reviews) and additional R&D control (Planning Consultants, Corporate Shuffle, Strategic Planning Group) could replace some of the ice and bit-gainer cards.

3	**Artificial Security Directors**
5	**Corporate War**
5	**Annual Reviews**
5	**Systematic Layoffs**
10	**Accounts Receivable**
1	**Edgerunner, Inc., Temps**
1	**Underworld Mole**
3	**Filter**
2	**Mazer**
1	**Haunting Inquisition**
4	**Data Wall**
1	**Rock Is Strong**
1	**Banpei**
1	**Asp**
1	**Cinderella**
1	**Colonel Failure**

Edgerunner, Inc., Temps and Underworld Mole are last resorts against virus stacks and Preying Mantis/Poisoned Water Supply; they can easily be replaced by Annual Reviews and Systematic Layoffs, for example, since including only one of each is unlikely to make a difference anyway. The ice selection is varied (very weak and very strong ice of all three kinds) to present obstacles for the Runner during the beginning as well as the end of the game. Personal preference may well dictate other combinations.

A more streamlined version of ASD/Corp War is the following by Yves Savonet from Liège, Belgium. He designed it specifically for the new Restricted environment and played a modified version (see below) in the French Open 2000 in Paris:

3	**Artificial Security Directors**
5	**Corporate War**
7	**Annual Reviews**
6	**Systematic Layoffs**
10	**Efficiency Experts**
4	**Filter**
4	**Roadblock**
2	**Haunting Inquisition**
4	**Data Wall**

The main differences are Efficiency Experts as bitgainers (more reliable if a Corp War is "lost") and the lack of stronger ice (just two Hauntings) for any endgame that might ensue. As Yves points out, the main issue is whether ASD/Corp War will be able to be an effective substitute for Psycho Tycho in the Restricted environment. ASD/Corp War's problem is that it must score three agendas to win, and—as fast as it may be in doing this—it usually is not fast enough to baffle tourney-level Runner stacks by speed alone. It takes seven or eight turns more often than not, although a "perfect" game could be won in five turns. That being said, it is almost impossible to outrun a Mantis/Poisoned stack, which

finishes in four or five turns. Yves notes that the first two agendas are not difficult to get through; it is the third that poses difficulties.

It would appear that ASD/Corp War is just a tiny bit too slow to win against dedicated no-run, speed Runner decks like Mantis/Poisoned, and that it is quite vulnerable to a number of common Runner strategies: Once set up, multi-access with Rush Hour and the like or R&D control with Microtech AI Interface/R&D Protocol Files will snatch away agendas before we can draw them. Ice destruction can also be quite effective against ASD/Corp War because it gets going right away. Any virus stack with a punch (Scaldan comes to mind) that seriously threatens HQ is also dangerous. Only stacks, like Big Dig or Bozomatic, that take a while to set up will usually be outrun by ASD/Corp War. Finally, Corporate War has a disastrous Achilles heel: Terrorist Reprisal, which is becoming ever more popular with Runners these days.

To counter multi-access, or early runs with Rent-I-Con, Yves exchanged four Annual Reviews with four Simon Francisco in the French Open, with moderate success. Holger Janssen has suggested including more copies of ASD than the standard trio (at least 5) to ensure drawing one early on. Although this waters down the agenda ratio, it is a good idea for stressing the speed of ASD/Corp War, which is its main aspect after all. Alternatively, Holger thought about including 4 to 6 anti-Runner cards (like 3 Manhunt and 3 Schlaghund) as a surprise, since most Runners won't expect this after seeing the first ASD.

Generally, the following hints seem to make the most of ASD/Corp War. First, by all means, be flexible. A lot depends on whether the first agenda you score is ASD (best case), a Corp War that is "won" (good as well, since it allows for decent ice protection), or a Corp War that is "lost" (worst case). If all goes well, minimal ice might be enough to hold off the Runner until victory. If we struggle with bit-gaining and card-drawing a lot, we should prepare for a longer game and set up some defenses. Also consider holding off a Corp War you can score out of hand, gaining bits until it can be "won".

Try to guess our opponent's strategy early on. With Top Runners' Conferences hitting the table, we should not bother with ice but just push through agendas as fast as possible. When facing ice destruction, fortifying HQ and Archives might be advisable, even if it slows us down a lot. With a fair number of ice cards, lots of bits and no need for subforts (which thin out our ice defenses), we might shut the Runner out for good. Against R&D control, put two or at most three pieces of ice in front of R&D and hope for the best, but select the ice wisely for maximum deterrence (Bartmoss Memorial Icebreaker just begs for Mazer or Roadblock, for example, whereas Data Wall is not so hot). Creating subforts for advancing agenda the "slow way" is usually not in the plan, but in a pinch, it might also be an option—especially if Precision Bribery rears its ugly head, or no-run stacks make Systematic Layoffs (and its overhead) redundant.

Mind you, ASD/Corp War is anything but a weak deck, and with just 3 essential rare cards, it is above all a good option for new players. However, it apparently is not dominating the Restricted tourney scene as much as some had expected it to—which we should be glad about, since nobody sheds a single tear for the demise of Psycho Tycho.

The Århus City Grid: Netrunner in Denmark

by Christian B. L. Sørensen
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History

After the Danish **Magic** wave back in '96 came some other CCGs, one of them being **Netrunner**. As a lot of the older gamers became tired of **Magic**, they looked for more interesting games—I'm not saying that **Magic** can't be interesting, but still they went looking.

One of the local roleplaying and conflict gamers once showed up at our small gaming club with some **Netrunner** cards, and we played a few games. Being miniature and roleplaying fanatics, however, we left it alone after a while, not to be tried again until **Illuminati: New World Order™** brought our attention back to card games.

With **Illuminati**, the older of us realized that designing a deck was as complex as creating a roleplaying character, and having a card game with a balanced deck was as exiting as solving complex plots. With this in mind, we started to play a lot, but soon realized that **Illuminati** had long-term faults despite its startup qualities. We tried some other games and eventually came back to **Netrunner**, which proved to be the best of all the card games we ever tried. The fact that it is not symmetric, with both sides playing different roles, was what made it stick this time.

Since '98 we have played many Constructed and some Sealed-Deck tournaments in our local game club in Århus. As old **Magic** players and even older lovers of tactical games, we played according to the 1-in-15 format, thus leaving no room for the money guys to dominate the gaming scene. The mere fact that some had 10 Roving Submarines, 5 Schlaghunds and 5 Blood Cats, while others had no The Deck, Access through Alpha or the like, was the reason for this.

Following the improved gaming level came the interest in WotC's website and other Internet-based information on **Netrunner**. Soon I joined the Netrunner-l listserv and printed out every mailing, to be perused in our club. In the midst of this I discovered that some players from Copenhagen were on the WotC player list. I emailed a girl called Nina and sent her approximately 600 assorted cards (C, U, R), so that she could start gaming and maybe open up a Copenhagen-based City Grid. Her studies in black holes and universal black stuff should make her an excellent megacorp boss, but also take up a lot of her time, so we'll have to wait on this one.

The year '99 saw a great step forward for the Danish **Netrunner** scene: I corresponded with Daniel Schneider and Stephen Holodinsky and arranged a trip to the German **Netrunner** Championship. The trip was made for fun, to learn how to conduct a CCG tournament—and to fly the Danish flag. Although I am one of Århus' best players, I completely choked on the amount of cheese being served at an Unlimited tournament. As a better-than-average 1-in-15 player, I was stunned when I discovered the possibilities in Unlimited. So I ended up being beaten—but it was fun, and I learned a lot. I then went on to Holland and Belgium on a business trip before going back home, and it all added up to a great journey. Once back in Denmark, we discussed what had happened and planned the '99 Danish Championship in conjunction with the release of *Classic*. But *Classic* never came to

Denmark, and so we waited and waited; the year passed by, and DM '99 did not happen.

Status

So, where are we at by now? Well, the Århus City Grid tends to buy up all the cards imported to Denmark (or so I have been told by our local shop, called Goblin Gate). We even have to buy from the Outpost in Germany to keep the 35-odd Århus gamers supplied, and I don't know what to do if more Grids should be formed.

This summer, though, we plan to support nascent City Grids (I work at an Internet company), hold more tournaments with guests from Northern Germany, and eventually hold the first Danish **Netrunner** Championships in three millennia. We're also planning a Danish **Netrunner** site containing information on all Grids and featuring all sorts of stuff about **Netrunner**.

The idea of judges for **Netrunner** like the ones in **Magic** is also a matter of concern, now that the DCI has ceased supporting **Netrunner**. I think that the TRC should form its own judge staff. Our miniature-games umpire (TT) is ready to help in this matter. On June 17–18 at the Magic Grand Prix in Copenhagen, I will meet Matthias Nagy, talk about my thoughts and invite him to the Danish **Netrunner** Championship 2000**—**and get 4 more *Classic* booster displays.

As the last point of this status report, I'd like to mention the **Netrunner** Dioscuri project headed by Doug Kaufman, which I am participating in. This gives **Netrunner** a completely new flavor, and I sincerely hope that it receives the approval of WotC.

Hopes

As a lover of this grand game, it's my hope that WotC and local shops will start to sell and support this game again, countrywide. If no product is on the shelves, no newcomers will become hooked to the best card game ever. It's been sad for the Danish **Netrunner** players to read the discussion about the new *Classic* cards without being able to play them, until our local shop finally had some *Classic* delivered last week. This failure to distribute new releases kills a game.

Now that the DCI has dropped their support of **Netrunner**, I also have the hope that the TRC takes over**—**it's "our game" in a way, after all. And if WotC stops producing it**—** let's found a company that buys the rights and does a reprint of it all.

Everybody is invited to visit our City Grid at `www.yupex.dk/aarhusgrid`**—**and feel free to send your comments.

Regards,
Christian B. L. Sørensen, Danish ***Netrunner*** *enthusiast.*

Interview with Douglas "Rabbi Small" Kaufmann, TRC Chair

by Jens Kreutzer
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Douglas, as TRC Chair, you are a kind of pivot of all **Netrunner** *activity. Although* **Netrunner** *players have had enough opportunity to get to know you a bit via the Net, especially through the daily* **Netrunner** *discussion group on Oracle, I'm sure they'd like to learn a bit more about you as a person. Would you care to tell us a bit about yourself, where you are from, what you do for a living, and maybe your family?*

First, I just want to say that I don't consider the TRC Chair to be pivotal at all. The Chair's true function is just to make it as easy as possible for everyone else to get things done.

About me: I'm 40 years old, and I've been a professional game designer since the '80s. My first published game was as rules developer for *Ace of Aces*, designed by Al Leonardi. From that I got a job at West End Games in New York City, where I designed, developed or edited such games as *Star Wars: Star Warriors*, *Arabian Nights*, *Web and Starship*, *Kings and Things*, *Escape from the Death Star*, *Battle for the Golden Sun*, and numerous **Paranoia** supplements and adventures.

Then I worked at MicroProse Software for six years, working on projects like *Civilization* and *Civ II*, *Darklands*, *Command HQ*, and *DragonSphere*. After a stint at AOL (in the games channel), I worked for a year at Firaxis Games, engaged in the *Alpha Centauri* project. Then, when Brian Reynolds formed "Big Huge Games" after leaving Firaxis, I joined him at his new company. So now I'm a computer game designer with Big Huge, waiting for funding from a major publisher (check out bighugegames.com for more info). I'm married to a wonderful woman, whom several **Netrunner** players have met, and we live near Baltimore, Maryland, USA.

How did it come to pass that you started playing **Netrunner** *(or TCGs in general)?*

Well, of course I started with **Magic®**. Since I had worked on *Arabian Nights* at West End, I got some *Arabian Nights*™ **Magic** cards as a gift; it looked interesting, so I took up the game. We played **Magic** a lot at MicroProse, working on the computer version. In fact, I got so sick of it there that I stopped playing for years. I was first introduced to **Netrunner** by a friend, and gradually got more and more involved. After joining the Netrunner-l listserv (which I read about in Byron's **Netrunner** Strategy Guidebook), I got involved in the formation of the TRC.

It's been said that the special flair of ***Netrunner's*** *background targets a rather narrow group of fans, namely, cyberpunk enthusiasts. Have read anything of the genre, and if so, do you have any favorites? Maybe you've even played the roleplaying game by R. Talsorian?*

Yes, I've played the RPG**—**in fact, I had a "cyberpunk dream" at the con where the rules were introduced. We had been driving for hours to get there; I got a copy of the book, read half of it, and fell asleep with it in my hands, and had a dream about a cyberpunk scenario. I was blown away by Neuromancer when I first read it, but I think Walter Jon Williams' Hardwired is the quintessential cyberpunk novel.

As we can read in this issue of the TRQ, **Netrunner** *finds itself in troubled times once more: After the "conquest" of* **Netrunner** Classic *came "crisis" again, in the form of Wizards of the Coast canceling all DCI support for the game. Although you have already made a statement on this in the lead article, I'd like to ask you again about how you see the future of the TRC as an organization from now on.*

I think as an organization we'll inevitably shrink, since the game is a "stagnant" one. But if we concentrate on fun events and the creation of new supplements or *Vanguard*™-like cards, I think we can stay alive, grow, and be an enduring fan club.

Personally, I think that the most important thing the TRC needs to do is to prepare and hold a World Championship 2000. Is there any information on the mode, the time (and maybe even the place) of such a tournament right now?

Nope, but we're getting started planning that right now, this very week.

What about this "Dioscuri" project we keep hearing about? What is it? Is it still going on?

Dioscuri is the working name for a *"Vanguard"* supplement for **Netrunner**. This would be six cards each for Runner and Corp that grant special powers that can't be trashed or negated. It's kind of like giving your Corp/Runner a special "identity." And yes, we're working our way through it. We've finished six Corp powers and we're just starting on the Runner now. Once we have six of those, we'll begin earnest playtesting. Our goal is October for a set publishable by WotC... I hope that it will help keep people excited about **Netrunner**. More as it develops.

There has been discussion in the newsgroup recently about the possibility of self-financed expansions. Though I think that this rather belongs into the future (we haven't even fully tried out Classic *yet), maybe R. Talsorian buying up the licence from WotC would be a way to go. Has anybody asked Talsorian about what they think about this?*

As far as I know, they've expressed interest—but their financial situation may prohibit that avenue of exploration. More likely is fan-funded supplements, perhaps with some Talsorian support.

Another thorn in the side of **Netrunner** *players is the desolate state of the TRC homepage. Are there any plans for regular updates anytime soon? The more WotC withdraws its support, the more important web-based resources provided by the TRC become.*

That's an excellent point, and something I need to put on my "to-do" list. It's vital that we have a vibrant, dynamic home page.

Turning to pleasant topics of conversation once more, I'd like to ask you about a few personal opinions on certain aspects of **Netrunner**. Classic *has been out for a while now, but players aren't too eager to post new deck ideas (yet?). What are your experiences with the long-expected new set?*

Well, I've seen one deck that I admire that uses Gypsy™ Schedule Analyzer to great effect. Other than that, in the one *Classic* tournament I've seen, the major influence is on the Corp side with things like Self-Destruct. My personal feeling is that there are a few good cards in *Classic*, but that it did not "shake up" the environment at all. In other words, there were no new "metagames" created with this set.

Are there any favorite deck strategies you enjoy in casual play?

As the Corp I try to build a flexible deck, with a little bit of everything. I find that a smattering of many different kinds of cards keeps most Runners off-balance and gives me a fighting chance. A more dedicated Corp deck might win versus certain Runners but will lose to many others. I prefer to have at least a decent chance against all of them.

As a Runner, I have to admit that I'm not very imaginative. My standard deck is a Loan-powered Bart/Joan that uses lots of R&D and HQ runs with extra card-digging power. Very dull. I had a Taxman deck that tried to bit-destroy the Corp, but while it was potent if it worked right, it was a bit too slow. In general, I find the Corp's ability to win very quickly is a big stumbling block to coming up with interesting Runner strategies.

Any favorite cards (maybe even "underdog" cards you'd like to see redeemed)?

Well, I like the bit-destroying concept. And I'd love to find some way to use card/bit power that doesn't rely on Bodyweight™ and Score! or Organ Donor or Loan. I wish the *Proteus* ice were more useful; I think lots of ice variation is fun. And I have this feeling that Rabbit is really underrated... ☺

What goes on in your mind when you open up the starters and boosters in a Sealed tourney?

I have a cheat-sheet I built for my wife, to follow when making Sealed decks. The basic premise is: Use everything that provides bits, and as the Corp use all fast advancement and at least 22 ice. As Runner, avoid any card with a high cost—doesn't matter how useful it is in the "long run." There usually isn't a "long run," since you need to be able to threaten a run at any time. Blowing 7 bits on a 3-bit stealth card may pay off after three runs, but without those 7 bits you'll be impotent for one or even two turns, and a good Corp player will ram something through on you.

A fun question just out of curiosity: How many Top Runners' Conferences do you own? ☺

Just one. I trade the rest to interested parties. ☺

This issue's "Wilson" column deals with ASD/Corp War decks. Since I conveniently have the TRC Chair (virtually) next to me, I'll grab the chance for some educated comments from you. The gist of the article is that ASD/Corp War, although it has been a staple of the tourney scene for long, is not as strong as it is believed to be. What is your opinion on this?

Well, I've been up against several of them in a single tournament, so that's really my sole experience. At the time I was playing my bit-destroying Runner and fared poorly against them, so they seemed quite powerful to me. My opinion is that ASD/Corp War may not be "powerful" in the metasense (in that it can win against any Runner stack you can build), but that its existence speeds the game of **Netrunner** up so much that only certain Runner strategies are viable. This means the decks all look too much alike, and the game is dull. I have a personal vendetta against Corp War and think it should be banned, though my opinion in no way controls what goes on in the TRC ban/restrict committee's mind.

Is it a replacement for Psycho Tycho in the new Revised Constructed environment?

Probably. Speed Corps of other descriptions may be just as heinous. I dislike them all.

Do you regularly play ASD/Corp War, or have you at least played it once in a tourney?

I built a Psycho Tycho as a "test bed" to make a decent Runner deck—I wanted to be able to win at least 33% of my games versus a Psycho Tycho. After we banned Tycho, though, I didn't automatically build an ASD/Corp War... I still use the Tycho as a test bed, and I don't like playing speed Corps in tournaments.

Any comments on strategy involved in playing ASD/Corp War?

The only thing I remember thinking as they were beating me is that punishing Black Ops agendas would be a way to go as

the Runner. I included a Hot Tip for WNS in my latest Runner deck, and it's served me well.

Finally, is there any message you would like to bring across to our readers?

Keep in touch! Just because nothing is going on right now doesn't mean it never will be. You don't have to be out there trying to stump for new players—just stay alert to new developments.

Thank you very much for this interview!

Thanks for taking the time and thank you for the TRQ!

Did You Know?
Bits and Pieces from the NR Trivia Collection
#7: The Shell Traders & Access to Kiribati

by Jens Kreutzer
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One of the more sought-after Runner rares, The Shell Traders is known as a nice alternative to standard-fare bit-gainers like Score! or Newsgroup Filter, although it only works for hardware and programs. It gets really nice when you soak up Lucidrine™ Booster Drug bits with it during a run!

But what strange artwork (both the original and the Promo version)—and why shells? The Shell Traders is once again a direct reference to the roleplaying game **Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.™** by R. Talsorian Games, which was used as a background for **Netrunner**. As can be seen in the supplement *Rache Bartmoss' Guide to the 'Net* (pp. 35-36), the Shell Traders are "a fast-growing group of independent netrunners operating in Kiribati", which is an island country in the Pacific formerly known as the Gilbert Islands (Kiribati is the indigenous way of spelling "Gilbert"—it's pronounced "Kiri-bahs" by the way). Today, Kiribati as a state consists of the Gilbert Islands, the Phoenix Islands, and the Line Islands.

The *Guide* goes on: "With the failure of the Kiribati government to regulate traffic and commerce through their national LDLs, some independent runners have set up their own shop to take advantage of the idea." This sentence, it seems, inspired the flavor text of Access to Kiribati. The name Shell Traders hints at the past of the Pacific archipelagos, when, on certain islands, seashells were used as a kind of money or ritualized gift. This tradition has to be seen as a backdrop when the *Guide* elaborates further:

"These guys are the master sellers of the 'Net. The security and openness that they provide bring people from all over the world to trade in their market. ... [They] run open markets on both the Gilbert Islands and the Kiritimati LDLs. They will trade for anything, but are most interested in stolen data and code. When they make a purchase (or trade... these guys are well-equipped for code-swapping), they download the contents of the files to their terminals and copy them onto disk or needle, erasing the version in the 'Net."

Kiritimati is an island belonging to the Line Islands; the name is the indigenous version of "Christmas". Because the Shell Traders send their data on disks through the mail (no, not email) or by courier, they don't have to worry about 'Net security. The card ability in **Netrunner** reflects the fact that the 'Traders are cheap ("install that card, at no cost"), but that you have to wait for the program in the mail—an AI Boon takes 12 turns to "reach" you if you don't help it along a bit.

The artwork of the v1.0 Shell Traders isn't much of a mystery anymore when one compares it to the black-and-white illustration on page 35 of the *Guide* (also in *Rache Bartmoss' Brainware Blowout*, p. 109). This picture shows a roughly-rendered, humanoid figure sitting in a hilly landscape of fractals, and it is subtitled "Shell Trader Sysop (with primitivist icon) awaiting a client near the Kirimati [sic] LDL". Although the humanoid is not a lay figure or mannequin used by artists like the one on the card illustration, it resembles one closely. The background designed by Mike Kimble evokes visions of Pacific islands in the ocean, whereas the original black-and-white background is rather nondescript.

Also prominent in the card illustration are the icons that seem to be floating around. The bar code in the lay figure's left hand might be representing an identity card or some sort of credit being transferred as payment, whereas the simplistic icons are once more directly taken from a **Cyberpunk** supplement, this time the *Chromebook* (vol. 1). On pages 91-92, it can be seen that the icons correspond to programs to be used by netrunners in the roleplaying game. Most of these, interestingly, don't appear in the card game, however.

These programs are (left to right, as displayed in the card artwork): Bunnies (though it sounds like Rabbit, Bunnies is a special defense program designed to thwart Vampyre II below), Fatal Attractor, Wolf (a Killer disguised as a Watchdog), Vampyre II (a D[a]emon that absorbs other programs it encounters and adds their abilities to its own), and, half obscured by the bit cost of the card, Termite (a very cheap and simple wallbreaker), of which only the lower legs are clearly discernible. Why the artist didn't include the Smarteye icon (an eyeball "wearing" a mortarboard cap) is anybody's guess.

Finally, a few words about the Promo Shell Traders artwork by David Ho: The currency symbols (dollar, yen, and cent) grouped around the futuristic polyp-like entity in the center suggest trade; the globule at the entity's lower end contains "an eye on top of a pyramid" – maybe a reference to the Data Masons flavor text. But that's stuff for another installment of Did You Know?.

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